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Abstract

The study of two dreams and other related texts will show the ambivalent dynamism of Cendrars's imaginary universe.

The first dream is a claustrophobic nightmare. The evident symbolism of the images reveals Cendrars's visceral need for changes and evasion as well as his constant rejection of limits. Both life and work follow the dynamics of escape and promote an ideology of separation.

The second dream is a dream of flight. Its symbolism and the numerous thematic variations encountered stress the dynamics of ascension and outline an ideology of the quest, complementary to the first dream. This attitude is defined as an Icarus complex, the metaphysical dimension of which explains Cendrars's disappointment with action and adventure.

A third group of figures suggests a new direction for Cendrars's aspirations, now related to the dynamics of fall. A strong desire for isolation and reclusion bears witness to a Jonah complex.

Torn by contradictory longings, Cendrars's split personality cannot experience unity except in a very transitory and frail stage such as the ambulatory cell or the dark room of imagination. Only writing, Cendrars's voluntary prison as well as spiritual adventure, allows the author to transcend the original dilemma.

Keywords

Blaise Cendrars, isolation, escape

ICARUS AND JONAH: FLIGHT AND CONTAINMENT IN CENDRARS'S WORK

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I

In *Vol à Voile*, recalling the nightmares he had as a nervous child, Cendrars remembers: «I had often dreamt that I was being chased into dead ends». The minute detail of the description that follows emphasizes the intensity of the memory and the traumatic experience of the dream: «Every other hundred yards a bracketed street-lamp cast a full light on the threatening railing hooks protecting the redans, a light that was reflected from the horrible glass shards festooning the tops of these impassable walls.» Transformed by anguish, the urban landscape becomes a confining universe: «I ran accompanied by all sorts of clicks and chattering in my legs and often I was caught in a man-trap or tumbled into a hole.(1) The physical sensations show the panic-stricken fear of physical, sexual or simply symbolic mutilation.

This nightmare reveals in Cendrars a deep-seated claustrophobia, which his escape from Neuchâtel seems to confirm. As the legend has it, locked in his room, condemned to bread and water like a prisoner in his cell, the adolescent was quick to flee, driven by an irresistible need for freedom.(2) Forty years later, the writer has not changed his mind: «A cage, even a golden cage, even if apparently made into a nest or a home, even a magical cage is not tolerable in the long run» (*Le Lotissement du Ciel*, O.C., XII, p. 253).

Nothing better characterizes Cendrars's persona than this fear of being locked in, this horror of closed doors. He wants to be without restraint or hindrance: «I am free, independent, I do not belong to any country, any nation, any social group. I love the entire world.» (*Moravagine*, O.C., IV p. 285). Traveler without a passport, citizen of the universe, he deliberately ignores borders. A vagabond with not fixed abode, he boasts of having more than twenty different addresses for the single year of 1913. Here today, gone tomorrow, he remains elusive, always between two depar-

tures. Ports and railroad stations are his favorite places. He moves across all social classes without prejudice or bias, indifferently strikes up a friendship with an extravagant aristocrat or a thieving ruffian, with a streetwalker or a solitary scholar.

Cendrars's persona and his other characters build their lives around a series of successive renunciations, denials and uprootings, but they often experience them as liberations. To become attached or intimate is also to become alienated. The writer makes no concession here. He purposely fosters confusion about his birthplace, his origins and his life because he wants to be the man without a past. His pseudonym separates him from his antecedents. To try to define his portrait is inevitably to betray it. Without a past, without a future, he exists only for the moment, a pause suspended between two durations, an empty space between two labels. Contradiction is an easy way to avoid the risk of confinement. Easy-going man, lover of pleasure or rigorous ascetic, in turn violent, aggressive or gentle, Cendrars prefers to remain unapproachable. He plays at being a man of action but holds nothing in higher esteem than contemplation; a library devotee, he curses books and despises culture; as a poet of modern times, of speed and progress, he sees in the sketch of the future world signs of the apocalypse. He expresses his anguish with a burst of laughter and his love of life is all the more intense because of his obsession with suicide. He refuses to be locked into any genre, style or technique, breaks away from Parisian artistic circles for fear of sclerosis; (auto)-biography and the illusion of freedom it implies suits him perfectly.

His life and the entire work follow the dynamics of escape so often suggested by Cendrars: «I have learned foreign languages in order to lose myself better and break away from my my habits and my tastes. If I move about without any reason, it is to lose my footing». (*Une Nuit dans la Forêt*, O.C., VI, p. 137). The characters of his novels, patterned after his own image, ardently practice this ideology of separation. Sutter the emigrant leaves his country, his family, an anonymous and inglorious past to seek his fortune in America. Jean Galmot leaves behind a cosily organized life in order to test his certainties. Moravagine, because of his extravagant ways, is banished by society and cheerfully transgresses the border between good and evil.

For a long time, Cendrars pretended to find in adventure an antidote to his claustrophobic anguish: «Only action is liberating.

It unties every knot» (*Une Nuit dans la Forêt*, O.C., VI, p. 138). But action, so often espoused by Cendrars, is a deceptive mirage. And Cendrars does not hid his bitterness. Aware of the futility of the battle, he compares himself to «a boxer and his shadow, in cold-blooded fury, shadow-boxing and studying his moves» (*Une Nuit dans la Forêt*, O.C., VI, p. 138). The panoply of the adventurer is to be shelved in the store house of illusions with that of the man of action. As intense as adventure may be, it is at best only «entertainment.» It leaves the author helplessly at grips with his phantoms because for Cendrars, claustrophobia is mainly of metaphysical origin; his fear of closed places, of darkness and immobility merges with his anxiety about death. He accuses Paquita of being an angel of death «...in her taste for the finished, for the consummate, for the meticulously polished, for the luxury she imparted to any detail, for something final. Well, perfection is a death sentence» (*L'Homme foudroyé*, O.C., IX, p. 290). On the contrary, Cendrars wants to be the man on the move for whom all is movement, evolution, becoming, life. He likes the temporary, the unfinished, for he must at all costs escape permanence. In a prophetic dream, Moravagine reminds us of this necessity. Locked up in a tiny cell, he dreams all of a sudden that «everything quivers. My cell disappears. The walls collapse, flap their wings. Life lifts me into the air like a gigantic vulture» (O.C., IV, p.100). Carried away by his dream of flight, Moravagine becomes a dragon, symbol of transcendence: «I don't belong to your race. I belong to the Mongolic clan which brought to the world a monstrous truth: the authenticity of life, the knowledge of rhythm and this truth will forever ravage your static houses of time and space» (O.C., IV, p. 101).

II

In *Les Rêves Perdus de Blaise Cendrars*, the author, remembering his childhood dreams, stresses the frequency and the astonishing repetition of his dream of flight: «When I was a kid, I often dreamt I was flying...I very often had the same dream: I was flying like a seagull above a harbor» (O.C., XV, p. 196). He underlines the ecstasy of movement, the agility of the body, the exploration of space: I soared, I circled in the air and I let myself go in very pleasant and rather dizzy exercises, grazing the water as I dove or rising very high in the air...(*Le Lotissement du Ciel*, O.C.,

XII, p. 42). The dream of flight brings to the adolescent the revelation of a harmony between his body and the universe. It fulfills his unsatiable need for freedom. He practices overcoming the obstacles which symbolically limit his universe: the curtains of poplars, the house without doors or windows; and when, one day in 1904, a boxed-in youth straddles the railing of the balcony of his room on the fifth floor and after a series of acrobatic pull-ups, touches ground and goes off toward the railroad station to catch the first train out; the dream of flight has become the reality of the text, Cendrars's mythical autobiography. Cendrars makes no mistake when he entitles the account of his escapade *Vol à Voile*. In order to justify the allegorical title of this little volume, he uses as an epigraph a significant excerpt from the journal of Roland Garros: «A furious bull is running after me. I am blocked against an obstacle—a desperate effort—I escape...through the air» (*Le Lotissement du Ciel*, O.C., VI, p. 286). Cendrars's rendering of the archetypal event proceeds through the same ternary pattern: pursuit through the alleys of Neuchâtel by his angry father, imprisonment in his room, and escape out of a high window.

The actual dream of flight corresponds to a precise time in Cendrars's life, but the myth is too powerful not to leave numerous traces throughout the work. The imagination transforms the initial themes, multiplies the variants. Each image, each phantasm thus transformed reaffirms the permanence of the myth. The dream of the tightrope walker, recalled in *La Tour Eiffel Sidérale* is almost mistaken for the dream of flight, so similar is it: «The tightrope walker! a dream I often had in my childhood,...I soared in space, delightfully, like the moon, head below and my feet waving above me!» (O.C., XII, p. 184). As they do in the paintings of Chagall, objects, animals and people at times occupy unusual positions in the work of Cendrars. In *La Prose du Transsibérien*, «the train makes a risky leap and lands on all four wheels,» and «on a high trapeze a woman does a half-moon bend» (O.C., I, p. 21 and 22). Even Cendrars, on the deck of Papadakis's boat, indulges in all kinds of gymnastic exercises because the acrobat who moves between earth and sky, in his agility and his ease, reminds him of the dream of a bird-man.

Not that the bird is absent from Cendrars's work, on the contrary. But the bird is rarely shown in flight. Less interesting as a winged creature, it has a dazzling, multicolored plumage, like the seven-colored birds that Cendrars tried to bring back from Brazil.

A short but significant passage of «Le Jugement dernier» (*Le Lotissement du Ciel*) reveals the isomorphic relationship between the aerial (clouds, wings, feathers, down) and the solar themes (dazzlement, iridescence, sparkle, reflections in the sun); the comparison with precious stones, which concludes the description, suggests the high valorization of the dream of flight. (3)

Nevertheless, for a man who shares all the passions of his day and even stands ahead of his time, the bird is a rather antiquated symbol. In the twentieth century one travels by plane. As early as 1912, Cendrars suggests to little Jeanne the possibility of escaping into dreamland on one of those marvelous machines. In *Panama* the poet brags of being «the first aviator to cross the Atlantic in a monocoupe» (*O.C.*, I, p. 26). Moravagine imagines an even more fabulous trip: around the world in an airplane! Fascinated by the conquest of the air, the author makes an appearance as a character in *Moravagine* working on the propeller of an airplane.

But what Cendrars is really leaning toward is interstellar space, an exploration undertaken in *L'Eubage*. Space travel, in Cendrars's time and during the infancy of aeronautics, partook more of the nature of dream than of reality. Landscapes were yet to be imagined and cosmic flight still offered the charms of dream flight: feeling of lightness, ease of movement. All is harmony and fluidity. High priest of space-travel, *L'Eubage* seeks to transcend the human condition, to penetrate the great mystery of the beyond, of the «unexplored region which is like the hinterland of the sky, from which rise the Forces and Shapes of Life and Spirit» (*O.C.*, II, p. 35). Interstellar voyage, a variant of dream flight, becomes metaphysical quest. It is a matter of symbolically photographing the dark side of the moon. Biblical time does not interest Cendrars; the only thing that interests him is time before Alpha and after Omega, before the creation of the world and after its destruction. In *La Fin du Monde*, thanks to a cinematographic device, he gives himself the illusion of satisfying his curiosity. (4)

Driven by the same need to know, he engages in the study of the starry sky. His gaze is often admiring, no doubt, but also questioning. In *Le Lotissement du Ciel*, en route to Morro Azul in the Brazilian jungle, he suddenly stops his car in order to better scrutinize «the blue expanses» crowded with «small cold suns.»(5) As Dr. Padroso Oswaldo never tires of saying, the description and scientific exploration of the heavens are less important than our interpretation of them. It is the meaning that one gives to one con-

stellation or another that matters, as with the mysterious «coal-sack» of the southern hemisphere in which the Brazilians from the interior recognize the devil, those on the coast, nothing at all, and the children perceive «the exit from the world, the door to the marvellous, the fairytale world of their nurseries» (*O. C.*, XII, p. 195). For Cendrars this dark hole, this hypnotic and mysterious abyss is absolute void, a question without answers.

It is useless for the voyager to question the stars and he does not succeed in discovering the secret of the universe. Weary of combing in vain the depth of the sky, weary of questioning science whose answers (or lack of answers) cannot satisfy him, he is not above turning to astrology: «every incoherent magic term in the astrologists' almanacs or in the illegible scribblings of alchemists tells us much more on the landscape of the sky and the enigmas of the universe than modern astronomers and scientists...» (*O.C.*, XII, p. 225). However, neither astrology nor astronomy, neither astronautics nor aeronautics bring Cendrars the wished-for answer.

The study of levitation, transplantation of dream flight to a mystical plane, marks the final landing of his long metaphysical quest. At the source of this phenomenon, Cendrars sees two different causes. The first is the ingestion of a mysterious plant, the hibadou, which the Amazonian Indians cultivate for its magical qualities. But this chemical method does not over-excite the writer. He is much more interested in mystical levitation, the subject of almost the entire fourth volume of his autobiography. However rare or strange the physical phenomenon, Cendrars sees in levitation the sign of a mystical experience toward which he eagerly aspires. In the chapter entitled «Le Ravissement d'Amour,» he fervently scrutinizes the narratives of the saints in order to better penetrate the secret of these «ravishments,» as he terms them. Himself familiar with contemplation, he shares his saints' mystical aspirations. His own outpourings mingle with those of Joseph de Cupertino, Saint John of the Cross, or Saint Theresa of Avila. «I do not know any more what I am saying in this rapture gushing from my mouth and lifting me toward Thee,...I chirp, cackle and twitter. The birds in the fields could not be more carefree...» (*O.C.*, XII, p. 140). A long list of birds follows, as Cendrars spontaneously returns to the ornithological theme, which, as we saw earlier, was one of the most immediate, early symbols of dream flight.

So the dream that Cendrars attributes to his childhood is never forgotten. Like a musician, he takes pleasure in multiplying the variations on a theme: the tightrope walker, the bird, the plane, the voyage in space, the stars, levitation. This long series of motifs ensures the permanence of the myth throughout the entire work, whether it be fictional or autobiographical, poetic or narrative. In fact, the myth appears in *Inédits Secrets* 1906, the first known texts, and recurs in the very last ones. Barely outlined or heavily underscored, it signifies the desire to escape, the wish to discover unknown lands and new horizons, but above all, the will to transcend one's own limits, the need for spiritual ascension. It is a dynamics of ascent as well as an ideology of the quest. With reference to one of the great mythical figures of the imaginary, one could describe Cendrars's behavior as an «Icarus complex.» Analyzed step by step, the adventure of Daedalus's son and the dream of Cendrars offer more than one striking analogy. To leave the labyrinth is to break free from the banality of daily existence, the imprisoning universe of reality, to flee the anguish of the human condition whose only escape is death. To create wings from a few feathers and a little wax, is to forget one's bodily existence in order to be open to spiritual life, to reach mystic transmutation. To climb toward the light and the sun is to yearn for the ineffable, via perfection, to achieve a mystical union.

III

The dream of flight and its numerous variations amply illustrate an Icarus Complex, one that reveals an unrestrained need for freedom, for escape, but also for both physical and metaphysical transcendence. Images and phantasms emphasize the constant presence throughout the work of this ascensional dynamism. As Mircea Eliade has stated: «The symbolism of ascent always signifies bursting through a petrified, blocked situation, the breach of a stage which allows passage to another mode of being.»⁽⁶⁾ Applied to Cendrars, this interpretation underscores the duality of the adventure. The alleged yearning for escape has in fact no other aim than the resolution of a metaphysical quest. At first intoxicated by his dream of flight, the writer soon becomes disillusioned and lays aside his adventurer's mask to uncover a more authentic need for contemplation.

Another series of motifs suggests a seemingly opposite orien-

tation inherent in Cendrars's impulses. The desire for isolation and seclusion that is revealed in a large number of characters bears witness to a Jonah complex. As there is in Cendrars a pleasure in taking flight, there is also a pleasure in turning back, in coming down and in being engulfed. Through a remarkable inversion of themes, the myth of the bird man is replaced by that of the castaway in the belly of the great whale. All the negative values of the Icarus complex are then coded positively. Gilbert Durand, who dedicates several pages of his *Anthropologie de l'Imaginaire* to the study of the Jonah complex, stresses the 'security-rending' function of being swallowed or boxed in. The confined space suppresses the fear of the unknown; the known is reassuring. Immobility suggests repose. Heat is synonymous with intimacy. Darkness becomes protective. Curled up at the bottom of his lair, sheltered from external assault, immobile and passive, Jonah symbolizes the return to fetal life, archetype of all vegetative existence. The closed-in place ceases to be a hostile universe; prison becomes a refuge; claustrophobia changes to claustrophilia.

The myth of Jonah has left many more or less explicit traces in the works of Cendrars, as in this epitaph poem where the writer imagines himself *in a large vat of indigo/ in the belly of a whale.*»(7) His interest in everything that has to do with whales is constantly reaffirmed; in *D'Oultremer à Indigo*, he speaks at length about the comfort and intimacy of the professors' club at the University of Upsala set up in the belly of a stuffed whale.

To this direct representation of the myth is added an infinity of others, in the form of variations. Even as he is dreaming of escape to far-away places and departures without return, the child Cendrars plays under the table and, in the space so defined, invents a world for himself. Gilbert Durand notes on this subject: «The isomorphism of the grotto, the shell, the egg and Tom Thumb is obvious in the imagination of a child playing under a table.»(8) In order to compensate for the instability of his universe, punctuated as it is by abrupt changes of luck, spur-of-the-moment trips, successive moves, the child symbolically recreates an immobile space which ensures his permanence, permits him to affirm his self-identity. In *Vol à Voile* Cendrars has a fetish for his storeroom: «I could retire there, hide out, live as I wished, imagine marvellous games without fear of being disturbed by others; for I would lock myself in with my animals, as I said, I called it my *menagerie*» (*O.C.*, VI, p. 304). Seclusion is already exclusion, par-

ticularly as Cendrars, in changing the names of things, recreates the world in his own way. No longer in his childhood, Cendrars continues to yearn for his store-room, but he has difficulty finding an equivalent. The garden in Naples, (*Bourlinguer*) carefully enclosed and over-protected by maternal interdictions, overwhelms him for a moment. But after Elena's death, perched on the wall, one foot in the garden the other in the street, the child becomes annoyed at his limitations. Icarus gets the better of Jonah. The fluctuation between the refuge and prison themes is constant. Cendrars will return to this same garden several years later for a very symbolic burial cure, the one Kipling's Kim undergoes; but the hole in which he hides himself, which should have been a cradle to him, is too much like a tomb. The failure is bitter and emphasizes the futility of Cendrars's search. Moreover, many a refuge may only be temporary. The abandoned barn of 'La Pierre' in the Loiret (*La Tour Eiffel Sidérale*) is a haven of peace and verdure, away from it all, from the war that is raging. The little cove of La Redonne (*L'Homme foudroyé*) lures him with its isolation, its difficulty of access, its semi-primitive nature. He admits being held in Aix-en-Provence «voluntarily confined for four years» (*Le Lotissement du Ciel, O.C., VI, p.266*). Dan Yack searches the ends of the earth for his desert island, then returns to Europe only to live in an almost unreachable Alpine hut. Insularity is the most extreme method of seclusion. The house that Paquita has set up for the writer (*L'Homme foudroyé*) creates these conditions at their very best. The house called La Cornue is both like an astrologer's house and an alchemist's laboratory, but Cendrars's private suite is designed (or imagined, dreamed, for the symbol is so obvious it cannot be simply by chance) as «a kind of huge cube without windows or doors, divided into small rectangular cells» (*O.C., IX, p. 303*). A fitting work place for the monastic life Cendrars so often wished to lead.

IV

Conscious of the duality of his aspirations and of the apparent contradiction, Cendrars, in an often used formula of systole and diastole, tries to provide a key to this paradox. (9) However, the alternation of opening and closing movements is less frequent than their synchronism. The writer wishes at the same time to leave and to stay, to open the doors to the sun and adventures and to keep

them carefully closed, in protective darkness. The simultaneity of the two movements is illustrated by two exceptional motifs: that of the mobile cell or «shepherd's cabin», and that of the fortified room or «Ali Baba's cave» and its immediate corollary, the library. In both cases the perfectly implemented fusion of the themes justifies the writer's exaltation.

Even as he is escaping for the first time, still entirely intoxicated by his recovered freedom, Cendrars's youth already expresses the need to remain shut in, to cut himself off from the world: «I didn't feel like stopping, getting off, or even getting anywhere. It felt wonderful to be in the trains, cradled in drowsiness or the din of the wheels. I didn't want to leave the stations» (*Vol à Voile*, O.C., VI, p. 321). The train compartment becomes a cell, as does the cabin on the boat. At the time of his Atlantic crossings, the writer often dreams of never landing, never arriving. Immobile in a confined space, Cendrars is without wish or want, in the most extreme exaltation because the landscape passes before his eyes and the world offers itself to him. The train, the boat, and to a lesser degree, the car symbolize the ideal cell, because they are mobile, the ambulatory abode of which Vigny had already dreamed.

Yet Cendrars knows his greatest joys, not while on a trip, but deep in a hermetically sealed cellar, like the fortified room of Saint Petersburg (*Le Lotissement du Ciel*). Outside the revolution is raging, but inside time has stopped. Cendrars sorts his stones, appraises them, reads, and now and then, to amuse himself, replaces the star on the map of the heavens with diamonds. Exactly as if he were before a starry sky, Cendrars loses himself in contemplation. From that time on, the walls of his prison no longer exist. «I had fallen into the unreal, and I have never been as happy, and as overwhelmed as I was on that day» (O.C., XII, p. 265). The fantastic nature of the scene enhances Cendrars's feeling of exaltation, but the writer needs neither precious stones nor that «soft, warm intimate, discreet» and almost sensual light of the candles to experience such intoxication. A similar scene is related in *Moganni Nameh*. The character, sad and weary after wandering for a long time through the town, ends up at the Imperial Library where he becomes absorbed in reading the XIIth chapter of Marbode, *Le Livre des Gemmes*: «Hours pass by, unnoticed» (O.C., IV, P. 48). The abolition of time, as in contemplation, accentuates the imaginary escape. Back to earth when the

library closes, the transformed Moganni Nameh resumes his stroll through town, «a wallet stuffed with valuable notes under his arm and his fingers covered with the marvellous dust of books he had leafed through» (*O.C.*, IV, P. 48). The influence of the imaginary on the young poet is altogether remarkable: «He walked slowly, Khalif of a Bagdad full of sunshine...and he was showered with red roses along the way...» (*O.C.*, IV, p. 48). Better than traveling, reading opens doors, reveals a different universe. Dark and dusty libraries are places of seclusion in the highest sense of the word. Nevertheless, the assiduous reader that Cendrars is experiences some brilliant soaring there. The bookseller Chadenat, one of the numerous figures in *Bourlinguer* is an emblem of Cendrars's work hidden in the middle of his retreat among stacks and piles of books far away from the world like a recluse in his cell.

There is no essential difference between the fortified room filled with dazzling precious stones and the libraries. Prisoner or voluntary refugee, Cendrars finds in seclusion what he had vainly searched for in escape. Jonah completes the interrupted quest of Icarus. The light of truth shines brighter at the bottom of the dark grotto than in the blue of the sky. Having taken refuge «at the core of the world» the poet takes possession of the entire world, «because to go to the end of the world» there is no need of train nor boat: meditation and its consummation, ecstasy, are sufficient.⁽¹⁰⁾ Shut-in between four walls, closed up within himself, Cendrars finds the answer to his existential «Angst» and opens out to the joy, fulfilling the prophecy of «la Mère gitane» in *L'Homme foudroyé*: she predicts for him a voluntary prison which is neither money, nor wealth, nor fortune, but is much better than happiness or love and much worse than death: solitude.⁽¹¹⁾ The prediction leaves a deep impression on Cendrars. The message is somewhat cryptic, but twenty years later, when the writer is studying his past, he deciphers the enigma and verifies the accuracy of the prophecy: «in this prison where I live today and from which I cannot escape (now I know what 'la Mère' meant by predicting a prison) I know that I am happy» (*O.C.*, IX, p. 268). By this 'voluntary prison' Cendrars means writing, but writing that is practiced as a spiritual adventure: «Generally, the writer is a recluse» (*Blaise Cendrars vous parle*, *O.C.*, XIII, p. 61). This adventure can only be pursued before a blank wall: «A writer must never sit in front of a panoramic view, no matter how grandiose it may be... Like Saint Jérôme a writer must work in a cell. Turn his back.»

(*L'Homme foudroyé*, O.C., IX, p. 116). Like the monastic life, writing is self-denial. The writer makes himself deaf and blind to the outside world in order better to perceive the inside world, remote, mysterious and so difficult to reach. Hence the necessity of closing off oneself, of turning one's back to the windows, of covering the mirrors. The first phase of writing is always one of introversion, of a trip inside oneself. Cendrars compares this often painful 'descent' to the work of a miner: «To write...to go down like a miner to the bottom of the mine with a griled lamp on your forehead...» (*Le Lotissement du Ciel*, O.C., XII, p. 244). In the deepest darkness the miner who discovers «the print of a woman's hand or man's foot fossilized in the coal layers» suddenly experiences an unbearable anguish of metaphysical origin, exactly like the writer who, having reached the end of his exploration, has the sudden revelation of «his human condition of miserable seed liberally profused in the vast universe» (*Le Lotissement du Ciel*, O. C., XII, p. 246). Voluntary prisoner of his ego, having reached the center of his being, Cendrars suddenly beholds the infinite: «Vertigo! Eternity is but a brief moment in space and the infinite grabs your hair and hurls you down instantly» (O.C., XII, p. 246).

Few writers have such a mystic conception of their profession: Cendrars himself, whether out of modesty or out of contempt, often feigned indifference or even disgust. Writing is merely a way of life, a deplorable punishment, «for it is so difficult to grasp things with words, to say all there is» (*Blaise Cendrars vous parle*, O.C., XIII, p. 21). Telling the ineffable, incarnating the impalpable, necessarily remains a disappointing enterprise in comparison to contemplation, which is for him true adventure—his genuine spiritual prison. That is what he declares before Michel Manoll's microphone, specifying that «contemplation can become an infinite and deadly despair which leads to suicide or madness as happened to Gérard de Nerval,...just as it can bring the greatest joy, as, I believe, it happened to me» (O.C., XIII, p. 73).

V

Cendrars gives us numerous examples of this boundless joy: thus the night spent writing *La Fin du Monde*, which he calls his most glorious night of love. Perhaps the most suggestive text is that long digression in *L'Homme foudroyé*, where Cendrars, evoking the delight of creation discovered in his voluntary prison,

invents symbolic wings of joy: «It should have been given wings, for we create only in joy and the object created must also partake of this joy and dance in the light» (*O.C.*, IX, p. 268). He then imagines himself as a laughing god, and concludes: «I know that I hold my creation and I'm soaring» (*O.C.*, IX, p. 286). The images found in this text (wings, dancing in the light, soaring) suggest a symbolic form of levitation. With creation Cendrars achieves his mystical flight, consummation of his spiritual life. And it is necessary that this flight be achieved in his prison, precisely when, in order to evoke his cerebral life he had recourse to the symbolism of descent: «Associations of ideas and images pulled me into the depths of the night, into a hole, into void, a vertiginous funnel at the bottom of which I ventured into silence» (*O.C.*, IX, p. 286). To descend in order better to ascend, to sink in order better to escape: Icarus and Jonah share the same adventure.

NOTES

1. Blaise Cendrars, *Oeuvres Complètes* (:Paris: Club Français du Livre, 1968-1971), VI, p. 311. Hereafter, page references appear after the abbreviation *O.C.* following the text of my translations.
2. The authenticity of Cendrars's autobiography has yet to be proved. Cendrars has been accused of deliberately lying, of purposely falsifying the facts and fostering confusion about the truth. He was incapable of distinguishing between reality and the world of imagination. Or maybe he was not...The fictive nature of the escape related in *Vol à Voile* has now been established. Jean Claude Lovey, Jean Buhler already mentioned the fact the Freddy Sauser actually went to Russia as a Franco-German correspondent for a Saint Petersburg jeweler. The publication of the *Inédits Secrets* confirmed it in 1969 and recently Hugues Richard disclosed the exact circumstances in which Freddy Sauser was sent to Russia with a duly obtained passport. Let us note, however, that «Songe n'est pas mensonge». Cendrars's work does not establish any boundary between dream and reality. And reality is but the shadow of dream.
3. *O.C.*, XII, p. 9 and 10.
4. *O.C.*, II, p. 20 ff.
5. *O.C.*, XII, p. 190.
6. Mircea Eliade, *Mythes, Rêves et Mystères* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p. 149.
7. Quoted by Hugues Richard in *Dites-nous, Monsieur Blaise Cendrars* (Lausanne:

Rencontre, 1969), p. 120.

8. Gilbert Durand, *Anthropologie de l'Imaginaire* (Paris: Bordas, 1973), p. 240.

9. «Systole, diastole; les deux pôles de l'existence. ...Contraction, dilatation, la respiration de l'univers, le principe de la vie, l'homme... . «Quoted by Jacques Henry Lèvesque in *Blaise Cendrars, Etude suivie d'une Anthologie des plus belles pages* (Paris: Edition de la Nouvelle Revue Critique, 1947), p. 69.

10. *Au Coeur du Monde, Du Monde Entier, Emmène-moi Au Bout du Monde* are titles of Cendrars's works.

11. *O.C.*, IX, p. 259.